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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PANAMA 001016

SIPDIS

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NSC FOR TOM SHANNON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PM](#) [POLITICS](#) [FOREIGN POLICY](#)  
SUBJECT: PANAMA: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON VICE  
PRESIDENTS-ELECT SAMUEL LEWIS NAVARRO AND RUBEN AROSEMENA  
VALDEZ

REF: A. PANAMA 1014  
[B.](#) PANAMA 1015

Classified By: DCM Christopher J. McMullen for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary: The "Gringo handler" and the politician

[¶](#)1. (SBU) Martin Torrijos chose a seasoned businessman with strong political connections as his First Vice President and a soft-spoken, but seasoned politician as his Second Vice President. First Vice President-elect Samuel Lewis Navarro is the son of former Noriega foreign minister (later anti-Noriega exile) Gabriel Lewis Galindo. The Torrijos team's chief "Gringo handler," the articulate, intelligent, pro-U.S. Lewis Navarro is a successful businessman with multi-national interests in fruit and packaging. Many have speculated that Lewis Navarro will serve double duty as Torrijos' Foreign Minister. Second Vice President-elect Ruben Arosemena is the President of the Popular Party (PP), which joined forces with the PRD for the 2004 campaign. Many campaign observers have suggested Arosemena, a second-term legislator from an influential political family, will spearhead President-elect Torrijos' anti-corruption initiatives.

Vice President-elect Lewis: The Businessman

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Born on July 15, 1957, Samuel Lewis Navarro is a non-politician who is extremely well-connected politically. He was the frequent companion of his father, Gabriel Lewis Galindo, during the latter's long career -- which included assignment to Washington as the Panamanian Ambassador to the U.S. (1977-78), a period of exile in the US during the 1980s, founding support work in the National Civic Crusade against Noriega, and finally a term as Foreign Minister (1994-96) during the Perez Balladares administration. Lewis Navarro has maintained his father's high-level political connections in the US. Former President Jimmy Carter and members of the Kennedy family have visited his home on Contadora Island off the Pacific coast of Panama.

[¶](#)3. (C) Samuel Lewis Navarro is a close personal friend of Martin Torrijos. He was the Vice President of the Solidarity Party until February 2003 when he withdrew his support from that party (his uncle, Samuel Lewis Galindo, is the party president) due to its choice of 2004 second-place finisher, former President Guillermo Endara as its presidential candidate. Vice President-elect Lewis had wanted Solidarity to back Torrijos after 1999 third-place finisher Alberto Vallarino (17%) dropped out of the race in January 2003. Lewis Navarro only made the formal break with Solidarity almost a year later when he announced his candidacy as Martin Torrijos' running mate. (Comment: Vice President-elect Lewis was not alone in his desire that Solidarity support Torrijos. Allegations appear farfetched that Samuel's opportunistic uncle used his party to support Endara only to split anti-PRD votes between Endara and 2004 third-place finisher Arnulfista candidate Jose Miguel Aleman, thus ensuring a Torrijos win. End Comment.)

[¶](#)4. (SBU) Lewis Navarro worked on behalf of the Solidarity Party for the presidential campaigns of his uncle, Samuel Lewis Galindo in 1994 and also that of Alberto Vallarino in [¶](#)1999. In addition to his political connections, Samuel Lewis Navarro has also consistently focused his efforts on running his family business CIACSA, a holding company that controls the Lewis family's numerous domestic and international business interests focused primarily on boxes/paper products and fruit processing. Appointed to the Board of Directors of the Panama Canal Authority by former President Ernesto Perez Balladares (1994-99), Lewis Navarro was replaced in May 2001 by a Moscoso appointee.

15. (U) Lewis Navarro has an undergraduate degree in business from Georgetown University. He is married to his second wife, with whom he has two children. He also has a son and a daughter from his first marriage. Panama City Mayor Juan Carlos Navarro is Samuel's first cousin; the two have a close relationship.

Vice President-elect Arosemena: The Politician

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16. (SBU) Ruben Eloy Arosemena Valdez was born on April 11, 1960. After attending the prestigious Panama City catholic high school Colegio La Salle, Arosemena obtained an undergraduate law degree at the Universidad de Santa Maria La Antigua (USMA), also in Panama City. Later, Arosemena obtained a Masters in International and Comparative Law from Southern Methodist University.

17. (SBU) Ruben Arosemena, the son of Christian Democratic Party (PDC)-founder Ruben Arosemena Guardia, is the President of the Popular Party (PP), which replaced the PDC. After his first position as Provincial Secretary General, Arosemena advanced through the ranks of the PDC to become national Joint Secretary General for the PDC's youth wing. Ruben was the PDC Secretary General in 1994 and a member of the Party's Executive Committee. Before moving on to the Legislative Assembly, Arosemena's first elected position was as local representative (Representante de Corregimiento) for the Panama City area of Bella Vista from 1984-89.

18. (SBU) The pinnacle of Arosemena's legislative career was his 2001-02 position as President of Panama's Legislative Assembly. He began working in the assembly as an alternate to Carlos Arrellano Lennox from 1989-94 in the upper-middle class 8-8 electoral circuit. During the same period, Ruben was also the Assembly's Secretary General. In 1994, Arosemena succeeded Arrellano to win the legislative seat that he now holds. He won re-election to the same seat in 1999.

19. (U) Prior to entering politics, Arosemena practiced law at the family law firm, R.R. Arosemena and Associates. He is married to the former Pilar Arias, niece of PDC co-founder Ricardo Arias Calderon who served as Endara's First Vice President. The couple has two young daughters. Ruben speaks fluent English and is a member of the Panamanian Association of Business Executives (APEDE) and the Rotary Club. He enjoys fishing.

110. (C) Comment: The Vice Presidents-elect, like Martin Torrijos, represent the same new generation of political leaders, one that all hope will leave behind the rampant patronage and nepotism that characterized the old.

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